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Practical Ways to Support New Arrivals

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Frank Monaghan

Practical ways to support new arrivals in the classroom



National Centre for Language and Literacy

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Dedication

Sándor Klári (1909–2004) emlékezetére, aki 1939-ban volt 'újonnan érkezett' Nagy-Britanniában, majd a magyar honfitársait és azok brit házigazdáit segítő 'tolmácsok nemes hadának' lett tagja 1956-tól kezdve. Hosszú élete emlékeztet minket arra a gazdag ajándéokra, mit akkor kapunk, valahányszor szeretettel fogadjuk a nálunk védelmet és menedéket keresőket.

In memory of Klári Sándor (1909–2004) a 'new arrival' to Britain in 1939 and a member of the 'noble army of interpreters' to her Hungarian compatriots and their British hosts from 1956 and beyond. Her long life was a reminder of the rich gifts we receive when we welcome in those who seek refuge and asylum with us.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Viv Edwards for her acute editorial guidance, to Catharine Driver, Graham Smith and Nicola Davies of NALDIC and to Sarah Reynolds and Lynne Knight of Salusbury WORLD for their invaluable advice on induction procedures and proformas. And to Claire, as always and ever.

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Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide practical advice on how best to support newly-arrived pupils. As chance would have it, I began writing this introduction the day after it was announced in the Queen's Speech to Parliament that asylum-seekers may be subject to electronic tagging and that those who do not leave the country when their application for asylum is rejected will lose all entitlement to benefits, which may mean their children will be taken into care. It's perhaps not such a good time to be a 'new arrival' in the UK.

It hasn't always been that way and in many places – especially beyond the febrile offices of MPs and tabloid journalists – it still isn't. Up and down the country, schools, LEAs and other services are working hard to ensure that all new arrivals are made welcome and given the opportunities to become effective learners and valued members of their communities.

We should also remember that not all 'new arrivals' are refugees or asylum-seekers. No figures are kept centrally on the numbers of other pupils from overseas but, as the EU expands and the world contracts, it is likely that we will see an increase in the number of 'casual' entrants to our schools: children whose parents are here for shorter or longer periods of time for study, leisure or work.

In the pages that follow we will be exploring:

- who these children are
- where and what they have come from
- why they are here
- what we need to know about them and their families
- how we can make our schools more welcoming places
- how we can make the curriculum more accessible
- what help we can get and where we can find it.

Temporary visitors

One of the beneficial offshoots of increasingly mobile global populations, the spread of English worldwide and political shifts such as the enlargement of the European Community, is the arrival of people from all over the world who want to spend some time in the UK. They may be helping to fill urgent gaps in shortage areas such as medicine, teaching and the IT sector, they may be rejoining their families for extended periods of time, they may be here to study. Some of them arrive with their young children and want to place them in our schools whilst they are here.

Many families come to this country when they are sent overseas by the business they work for. For example, in 1996 there were some 51,000 Japanese living in the UK; 10,000 of these were of school age. Some stay permanently to be reunited with their families; others will be here for longer or shorter stays as visitors, students or workers. So, be they butchers or bakers, doctors or diplomats, scholars or soldiers, they may arrive at any point in the year to spend indefinite periods of time here, placing their children in a local school – possibly yours.

The best of both worlds

Maintaining the language of the home is very important for many families, from Panjabi-speaking Sikhs who have been settled in the UK for three generations to more recent arrivals. In the early days, the emphasis is, of course, on acquiring English but, as time goes on, it is increasingly important for children to maintain their first languages both in order to communicate with the wider family and also to be able to reintegrate into the school system in the home country if the stay in the UK is only temporary.

In smaller more dispersed communities, parents often take sole responsibility for this task. Many students from the Republic of China pursuing higher education in the UK, for instance, will spend an hour or more each day on activities related both to reading and writing in Chinese and to maths, in the hope that their children will not be disadvantaged when they return to the highly competitive Chinese education system. Larger communities organize complementary classes, which allow children to continue studying their family's language and culture, often on a Saturday or Sunday morning; a community of Libyan students in Manchester offers a whole day programme on Saturdays.

The pressure on children to keep up is often intense. Kazue Aizawa (1999) describes how students at her Japanese Saturday school talk about 'black Fridays' when they prepare for the next day's lessons:

I expect my students to spend at least three or four hours preparing for a lesson. Quite a few students stay up until two or three o'clock in the morning, preparing for the next day. Some students manage; a few manage magnificently but, inevitably, others do not and I think we have to face the reality that some students simply cannot juggle two sets of school work at a time.

This situation is, of course, played out in various guises in many other settings up and down the country. Understanding that our students may be exposed to different curricula and pedagogies in complementary schools is the first step in offering children appropriate support. The next is to establish links with their other school to see if there are useful connections that can be made that would help reduce the pressure and enrich both partners.

The Japanese experience

Adjusting to a different education system can be a demanding experience. The challenges differ from one community to the next. Most Japanese people living in this country, for instance, experience a tension between their need to adapt to the host country and their wish to maintain their Japanese identity. Joanna McPake (1999) identifies below four striking areas of dissonance for children who find themselves in British classrooms.

Talk and silence in the classroom

British education values the role of children's talk in learning; Japanese educational philosophy suggests that children learn best by listening to the teacher. Although this paradigm is slowly beginning to change, the potential for conflict is clear.

The relative importance placed on knowledge and skills for learning

In British education the emphasis is on learning how to learn, and content is largely a vehicle for understanding processes. The Japanese model is based more on information processing, where children learn facts and are tested on their ability to memorise them. This places great stress on children who know that, no matter how hard they work, they will forever be falling behind their peers at home.

In both these areas, ensuring that parents and children are informed and reassured about the rationale for our practice, ideally at interview or through

parents' meetings, is essential. Equally, it is important to provide some continuity with the child's previous experience of other styles of learning and teaching, by building in appropriate, familiar activities, either in class or through homework tasks. One of the most important ways of doing this is through the use of the child's first language and with parental involvement.

Expectations of academic achievement and educational aspirations

The pressure to meet expected standards in Japan is even higher and more relentless than in the UK. Japanese students in UK schools are commonly perceived to work unflaggingly. The 'unpopular swot' syndrome has long been an unattractive feature of our classrooms and, when transferred from an individual to a whole minority group, the dangers are obvious. Schools are working hard to create a 'cool to be smart' culture, however, and careful targeting of Gifted and Talented activities can be one way of ensuring that self-esteem is raised rather than lowered. The National Association for Gifted Children has produced a helpful booklet with illuminating case studies of how schools have developed best practice in this area (NAGC, 2003).

Notions of cultural identity

Japanese children can therefore find themselves in no man's land where their outward appearance marks them as 'other' to their British teachers but to their parents they seem to be becoming 'other' and losing their 'Japaneseness'. This is not to suggest that Japanese parents are isolationist: they undoubtedly recognise and want to make the most of the benefits of relocation, but they also recognise what is being displaced. Involving parents and including and validating aspects of their culture in the curriculum and life of the school can go a long way to avoiding the 'gap'.

Refugees and asylum seekers

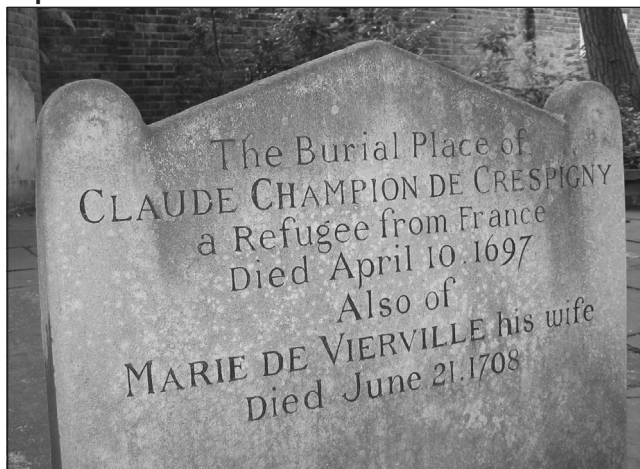
Imagine

Imagine having to move to another
country
Because of a war
That other people started.
It's not your fault.
In fact it has nothing
To do with you.
You leave your friends and relatives
behind.
You arrive and you don't know
anyone,
And nobody knows you.
You're alone and scared.
You have to make new friends,
And get used to the place.
You have to learn a totally new
language
You go to school
And everyone stares at you like
You're different.
You feel that you are.
But inside you're the same
As everyone else.
I'm glad I wasn't
Put in that situation.
Aren't you?

Abdul J. Choudhury
Burnage High School, Manchester
From the anthology, I am here but my soul is
in my country...
Published by Manchester EMAS to celebrate
Refugee Week, 2002
Reproduced with kind permission.

Many newly-arrived families find themselves in the UK because they have little or no choice. These are called refugees and asylum-seekers. Although both terms are often used interchangeably, 'refugee' has a precise and significant legal meaning: someone who has fled their home country or is unable to return 'owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'. An asylum-seeker is someone who has crossed an international border in search of safety and refugee status in another country. It has been estimated that there are some 12 million refugees worldwide and in the region of a further 27 million people living in refugee-like situations (the vast majority of whom are internally displaced, having been forced to flee their homes but remaining within their country's borders).

A proud tradition



The UK has a long tradition of welcoming people, dating back at least to the twelfth century when Armenian merchants fled to escape Ottoman persecution. The first large-scale influx was that of around 150,000 Huguenots in the seventeenth century; this was followed by around 200,000 Jews from the Russian Empire, Romania and Galicia in the late nineteenth century; about 250,000 Belgians seeking safety from the First World War; and around 56,000 refugees from the Second World War from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia as well as some 4,000 unaccompanied Basque children; 250,000 refugees from Poland arrived in the UK between 1939 and 1950; and 17,000 Hungarians came in the 1950s.

On and on the list continues into more recent living memory, with mass movements of people from Afghanistan, Chile, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iran and Vietnam in the 1970s, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Turkey in the 1980s, and Algeria, Angola, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zimbabwe in the 1990s and new millennium. There is no reason to believe that these movements of people will ever stop and nor should we forget the substantial benefits that have accrued to the country as a result. According to a recent Home Office study, in 1999–2000 migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, made a net fiscal contribution of approximately £2.5 billion.

As an example of how one of these groups was received, in November 1956 the Times Educational Supplement distributed an Anglo-Hungarian phrase-list to Hungarian refugees, who were asked to give it to their hosts 'to help mutual understanding.' In addition to such helpful phrases as, 'What is your name? = *Mi a neve?*' and, 'I only speak a little Hungarian, = *Keveset tudok magyarul,*' the guide touches on cultural differences.

TALKING TO THE REFUGEES

The Hungarian refugees who have arrived in this country have in the first stages had the help of a noble army of interpreters who have been attached to relief workers in reception centres. Linguistic difficulties are likely to start, however, when they reach the families who have offered to take them in. In a few cases German may prove a useful *lingua franca*, but many of the Hungarians who have come are industrial workers who are unlikely to know any foreign languages. This is an attempt, then, to give a few useful phrases and hints to English hosts who are unable to communicate with their guests. The stress is always on the first syllable.

English equivalents of tricky Hungarian letters are given :—*a=o*

= *Jó reggelt Kívánok!* Good night=
Jó estét kívánok! Goodbye=*A*
viszontlátásra! Good health=
Egészségére!

What is your name? = *Mi a neve?*
Where do you come from? = *Honnan jön?*
Do you understand? = *Érti, amit mondok?*
I do not understand = *Nem értem.*
Welcome = *Isten hozta!*
Are you well? = *Jól érzi magát?*
This will be your home in England = *Ez itt lesz az angliai otthona.*
I only speak a little Hungarian = *Keveset tudok magyarul.*
Do you speak German, English? = *Németül, angolul tetszik beszélni?*
Hungarian is a difficult but beautiful language = *Nehéz a magyar nyelv, de szép.*
Don't be afraid = *Ne tessék félni!*
No matter = *Nem baj!*

'English hosts should be warned that they may find their guests' eating and drinking habits odd... If they refuse a welcoming cup of tea, it will not be because they are not friendly, but because they are not thirsty.' This welcoming and inclusive attitude to 'new arrivals' is sadly not such a strong feature of the response to refugees and asylum-seekers in media coverage today.

The situation today

The UK is home to about 2 per cent of the world's refugees and asylum-seekers (though, according to a Refugee Council survey, on average people in the UK believe the figure is a staggering 23 per cent). The main countries of origin were Iraq (17 per cent), Zimbabwe (9 per cent), Afghanistan (9 per cent), Somalia (8 per cent), and China (4 per cent). A glance at the international news section of any serious newspaper will indicate that these figures reflect the conflicts and turmoil currently raging in those areas, just as the statistics on declining numbers of applications from countries such as Sri Lanka reflect present trends.

In 2002, the 80,000 or so asylum-seeking and refugee children in UK schools came from some 58 national groups. The vast majority – about 63,000 – were in Greater London where they accounted for some 6 per cent of the total pupil roll. Manchester and Glasgow have similar proportions, while in other areas asylum-seeking and refugee students tend to be found in more isolated pockets. There is a natural and entirely understandable reluctance on the part of refugees and asylum-seekers to move away from areas where they may have established vital family and community links and gained access to much needed support. If the government's policy on 'dispersal' takes root, however, there may be some shift in the figures. Wherever families find themselves, the availability of housing leads to a high level of mobility. Children who have just begun to settle in at one school are often faced at short notice with the draining task of starting over yet again at another.

Preparing for new arrivals

As with any new child entering our classroom, the more information we have on their previous experience the better. It would be a mistake to assume that, simply because a child is (relatively) new to schooling in the UK, they will have had little or no relevant experience of formal education and life in general that we can build on. They may, however, have had a fractured experience, not least due to a delay in finding a school place. Equally, however, it would be misguided not to consider the likely consequences for a child of displacement, conflict and loss. Whilst it is useful to know whether a child comes from a wealthy and well-educated family or a poor and illiterate one, this information of itself will not tell you how they have reacted to and learned from their recent experiences. The crucial point is not to make any assumptions, instead we should make every effort to find out as much as we can about children's social and educational background so that we can meet their needs and help them progress from whatever starting point they are at.

The wider context

Providing colleagues with key information on the main countries of origin of children in their school will help them place a new arrival in context. Some schools store such information in an A4 ring-binder in the staffroom so that it can be referred to and updated easily. Some also use staff briefing or training sessions to focus on a particular country at a particular time. The important point is that information only becomes knowledge when it is used purposefully by staff in planning for a new arrival's learning needs.

The types of information that might usefully be covered include:

- **Statistics** showing a pattern of migration or indicating parts of the country where the group is concentrated and which might be useful in terms of locating community support groups and other resources. LEAs with larger numbers from a particular community may be able to help nearby LEAs with only small numbers with resources such as interpreting services.
- **Divisions within the larger ethnic group** It can be very important to know whether there are rival factions when assigning a child to a particular class or group. It would be wrong to assume that because a child is a Shi'a Muslim they should not be placed with a Sunni Muslim, of course, as – at least initially – they are likely to have more in common with each other than with their non-Muslim classmates. That said, it is as well to be aware of potential tensions in relation to outside events, which may affect the two communities very differently.

- **Languages commonly spoken** Where several languages are spoken in a country, it is helpful to know the major varieties and the official varieties used in schools. Turkish children, for instance, may include both Turkish and Kurdish speakers, but only Turkish is used in school. It is also useful to know which languages are mutually intelligible and which are not when making decisions about placing a new arrival in a class that has another child from the same country; they may or may not be able to communicate! Ideally there should be some information about the written form of the language (where there is one), for example whether it uses the Roman or another alphabet, how many characters the alphabet has, what direction it is written in (left-right, right-left, top-bottom), etc.
- **Names** Different cultures have very different naming systems, for example Vietnamese names have three parts. The family name comes first, followed by a middle name and then a personal name. There are about 25 extremely common Vietnamese family names, such as Hoang, Nguyen and Tran. The middle name is a second personal name and may add meaning to the first as in Minh Chau – Beautiful Pearl. The middle name indicates the person's sex, such as Khin for a boy and Nhi for a girl. Women do not change their name on marriage but are commonly addressed by their husband's family name.
- **Religions** It is easy to assume that, say, all Sudanese people are Muslim. Although some 70 per cent are, the second largest religion is Animism (18 per cent) followed by Roman Catholicism (8 per cent). Some information on important religious festivals can be very helpful both in making a new arrival feel included and in raising the awareness of the other children of the diversity of beliefs, especially where the class is largely mono-cultural.
- **Education system** It is important to know about access to education in a particular country. Is it compulsory? If so, up to what age? Is it free? When do children start school? Is the curriculum the same for boys and girls? What is the medium of instruction? What is the examination system? What is the literacy rate?
- **Economy** Although many parts of the world today are industrialised, the images we tend to see of places outside the northern hemisphere are of rural communities with poor amenities. This can lead to false assumptions about a child's background.
- **Key recent events** In the case of recent arrivals, it can be very useful to know about the political events which may have caused people to leave their home country. Is it a case, for instance, of on-going strife (with long-term effects on more than one generation) or a single, recent event?

Individual information

As well as providing general information on a child's wider context, it is important to ensure that staff are provided with an individualised profile of a new arrival so that informed decisions and appropriate plans can be made. This can take many forms depending on available information and resources.

Admissions interviews



The resource pack produced by the Salusbury WORLD Refugee Centre includes guidance on classroom activities and after-school play opportunities.

It is important to have clear interview procedures, which allow the school to gather the data it needs for planning and also to provide the family with information on their child's schooling and what help might be available.

Salusbury WORLD, currently the only Refugee Centre in the country based in a primary school, sees the admission interview as providing 'an opportunity to create trust between parents and teachers and a successful home-school partnership.' For this opportunity to be exploited to the full, any such meeting needs careful planning in order to decide:

- **Who will be involved** Secretarial staff, class teacher, *EAL/bilingual support staff, home-school liaison officer?
- **When** Will it take place, for instance, on set day(s) to enable interpreters or other peripatetic staff to be present?
- **Where** Can a private space be provided to ensure confidentiality? Will it be a dedicated space so that any relevant documents can be referred to, such as the school handbook?
- **The outcomes** The school can expect to complete its admission form; the parent may leave with a welcome pack. Such a pack could usefully include:
 - the school handbook with information on uniform, rules, curriculum, term dates, home-school agreement, etc
 - information about the local area, including transport routes to the school, a street map, etc
 - adult education classes; health (NHS Direct, local GPs etc.)
 - general information (sports and leisure, services such as SureStart, mother and toddler groups
 - information for refugees and asylum-seekers (booklets available from the Red Cross and the Refugee Council).

*EAL – English as an additional language

Admissions form

Child's details

Child's name

Child's preferred name

Age

Gender

Ethnicity

Religion

Address

Is this address

permanent ☐ temporary ☐

Telephone number

Emergency contact number

Family details

Parent/carer's name

Has the child had a recent change of carer?

No ☐ Yes ☐

Is the child in care?

No ☐ Yes ☐

Number of siblings if any

Position in family eg eldest

School details

Is the child entitled to free school meals?

No ☐ Yes ☐

What languages can the child

speak write

Does the child need an interpreter/translator?

No ☐ Yes ☐

Admission date to school

Date of arrival in UK

Refugee status

Previous schooling was in

UK ☐ Abroad ☐

Community language

Supplementary school

Contact teacher

Buddy

Other details family chooses to disclose eg SEN, relevant experiences

Other information eg skills, interests, health

Assessment

Pupil: Baneen Sharif Ali

Suggested targets

Date: 29/01/04

Review: 01/05/04

Baneen is at an early stage of developing basic interpersonal English. It should be noted that the assessment was carried out just a week after joining the school and it may be that she will demonstrate further skills in English once she has settled in to her new environment. She has had a full education in Iraq. She is literate and numerate in Kurdish and can decode in English but will require support to access meaning from text in English. She is unfamiliar with UK NC.

She will benefit from inclusion in curriculum input and output through differentiated work, small group work with fluent speakers of English and EAL-informed teaching strategies. If EAL/bilingual specific support is available this will greatly improve her progress.

A Kurdish-English dictionary would be useful to Baneen. She will benefit from a focus on oracy initially and her current decoding skills and literacy in Kurdish should enable good progress.

Wherever possible, an early assessment of the learner's skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking should be undertaken by an EAL specialist. This might include more or less detailed comments in relation to the child's abilities in English, perhaps in relation to national curriculum levels in terms of speaking and listening, reading and writing. Mathematical skills can, to some extent, be assessed without much use of English and may reveal facilities with, for example, number and shape hidden by a lack of English. Similarly, assessments of skills in areas such as drawing, singing and physical coordination provide insights that narrower English-based testing could not possibly capture.

Ideally, children's abilities will be assessed in their strongest language(s) as well as in English. Where available, the support of a bilingual assistant from the same linguistic background will obviously be extremely valuable although it is possible to make a superficial assessment on the basis of children's ability to read or write a text in their first language more or less fluently.

Initial pupil profile: English skills and strategies

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Speaking and listening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to use simple language structures to talk about herself and issues of immediate interest. - Able to explain and express her ideas, generating her own sentences based on those modelled during/ after curriculum input. | <p>Strategies/Support:</p> <p>Small group sessions useful to develop simple language structures particularly if combined with a supportive reading scheme.</p> <p>Introduce Baneen to subject specific vocabulary and encourage use of a bilingual word book. Support pupil output through modelling and scaffolding and provide opportunities to talk her way into meaning through pre-teaching/oral starters.</p> |
| <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to access reading scheme text, identify key story elements and respond accurately to open and closed questions based on text. - Able to access text-based curriculum information. | <p>Strategies/Support:</p> <p>Individual or small group reading sessions with school-based *EMAG or other staff, focusing on comprehension of text. Choice of appropriate reading books for home study or ICT support packages.</p> <p>Provision of appropriately differentiated text-based information or access strategies.</p> |
| <p>Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to complete simple written tasks in non-narrative form based on curriculum input. - Able to write own simple texts based on those modelled in class. | <p>Strategies/Support:</p> <p>Provide writing frames of other scaffolded writing tasks.</p> <p>Model approaches to writing in narrative and non-narrative forms through teacher demonstration and/or provide access to samples of other pupils' work.</p> <p>Appropriate feedback on written work.</p> |

Targets agreed and supported by: *Chris Ryder, Class teacher*

Targets agreed and supported by: *Frank Monaghan, EMAG support*

*EMAG – Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant

Based on these initial assessments it should be possible to suggest specific teaching strategies to support further developments in key areas, as set out below.

Teaching strategies

| Name | Class | Home language | Previous education and literacy | Language and curriculum access strategies |
|---------------|-------|-----------------|---|--|
| Mokbul Islam | 4 | Bengali/Sylheti | Mokbul is fluent in Sylheti but not literate – very little primary education. Has some basic spoken English. | Mokbul should sit with a Bengali speaker. Responds well to pictures and diagrams and likes to copy. Let him dictate what he wants to write first. |
| Angel Jimenez | 6 | Spanish | Angel is from Cuba and has had a full primary education in Spanish – fully literate and appears very able. | Angel has just arrived in the UK and his parents say he is very quiet. Allow him to remain silent and tune in – he will understand and absorb a lot. Encourage him to use a bilingual dictionary to look up words. |
| Ingo Mishima | 6 | Japanese | Ingo (absent German father) has been brought up in Japan by his mum. He has some literacy in Japanese but is still learning the English alphabet and letter sounds. | Ingo will need lots of support. He can copy accurately if the writing is clear and he is near the front. Very structured activities needed – gap filling, diagram labelling etc. |

It is, of course, also possible to produce much briefer profiles that provide a ‘short-hand’ overview (eg by assigning a commonly understood NC level) and focus on ‘survival’ information (eg ‘She has been educated in a Tamil medium school – fully literate; vegetarian, Indefinite Leave to Remain; Genevieve Jayamaha in Year 5 speaks Tamil’). Aspects other than curriculum knowledge and skills might be the focus, for example, one school has a section in its profile on the student’s ‘group skills’, that is their perceived strengths in or need of:

- friendship
- paired work
- talk partners
- peer group support
- collaborative work
- problem-solving
- mixed ability work
- guided work.

Another school that has frequent new arrivals sends out regular ‘group’ profiles of all new arrivals containing a single paragraph summary of the child’s language skills and previous education and a further paragraph suggesting some broad strategies to help the child access the curriculum.

Whatever format you decide is appropriate for your context, the important point is to make sure the information is useful and used!

Special considerations for refugee and asylum-seeking pupils

Particular issues may arise in relation to children of refugee and asylum-seeking families, which it is advisable to be prepared for.

Trauma

Trauma comes in many forms. It may be entirely physical, such as a blow to the head, or it may be an emotional wound caused by witnessing the suffering of others. The effects may last for longer or shorter periods of time, depending on their nature and individual responses. Some refugee children will have no direct experience of persecution; others may have witnessed the brutal murder of family and friends, or even been kidnapped and tortured themselves. Many will experience the trauma of poverty, a severe and often underestimated cause of stress in itself. The longer and more intense their stress, the more likely children will be to suffer psychiatric disorder. In a study of 2,200 Lebanese children's experiences of war undertaken by Mona Maksoud (Rutter 2003), it emerged that:

- 90.3 per cent had been exposed to shelling or combat
- 68.4 per cent had been forcibly displaced from home
- 54.5 per cent had experienced shortages of food, water and other necessities
- 50.3 per cent had witnessed violent acts such as murder
- 26 per cent had lost family and/or friends
- 21.3 per cent had become separated from their families
- 5.9 per cent had been injured
- 3.5 per cent were victims of violent acts such as arrest, detention and torture
- 0.2 per cent were forced to join militia.

Other studies of conflicts in Cambodia and Central America have revealed similar patterns. It is worth remembering that roughly 85 per cent of casualties in modern warfare are civilians.

Flight

Having escaped the immediate stresses of conflict or repression in their home country, refugees face new stresses associated with flight. These include the risk of being captured, arrested, beaten, returned home, and separated from family, temporarily or forever. The child may have been kept in the dark about the plan to leave and so may be traumatised by the sudden removal from a familiar environment, family, friends and pets. The journey to the UK may have been a single plane ride or it may have been dangerous and exhausting. Many will have spent time in refugee camps along the way where they will have been at risk of isolation, overcrowding, malnutrition, poor sanitation, exclusion from decision-making, limited access to schooling, and increased

risk of violence and rape. In such conditions, it is difficult to avoid an increasing sense of powerlessness and hopelessness that may lead to deteriorating mental health. This is one reason why involving parents as actively and extensively as possible in planning and decision-making is so crucial.

Arrival

Entry to western European countries has become increasingly difficult. For example, in this country 80 per cent of applicants were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) in 1992, and 16 per cent were refused; in 2002, 24 per cent were granted ELR and 66 per cent were refused. Many people who are forced to flee their homes now feel compelled to arrive by clandestine routes (eg hidden in trucks and containers). Those who do put their lives in the hands of traffickers pay dearly for the experience, often exhausting their financial resources. It is difficult to imagine the stress caused by having to take such drastic steps and find yourself criminalised for trying to protect your family. Aside from the risks of injury and even death en route, the 'successful' entrant then has to live with the impending threat of exposure, condemned to working in the black economy and living on the margins of society. Not the healthiest atmosphere in which to raise your children.

How can schools help?

Teachers working with children who are going through the asylum-seeking process, fighting an appeal or even facing removal can help by giving the family both moral support and also more concrete help such as:

- Establishing that the family has good legal representation. Legal aid is available for the asylum application process but not beyond – the family has to represent itself or get support from the Refugee Legal Centre, Asylum Aid, or a lawyer who will work for free.
- In the event of an appeal, helping them gather compassionate evidence, particularly in relation to their child, and passing it on to their solicitor. Teachers should not, however, contact the Immigration and Nationality Directorate directly.
- If the family is facing removal then the teacher might help in any campaign to resist the decision or by supporting the child to prepare for return. It is likely that the child will want to talk about their worries and their conflicts about returning home and leaving their friends and school. The school can also help by making sure the child has copies of any certificates or records of achievements (ideally translated) and easily transportable samples of work. Personal mementoes such as class photographs could also be given to the child.

Language development in the classroom

Five key principles should underpin planning for the language development of new arrivals in the classroom:

Activate prior knowledge What we get out of a text is partly determined by what we bring to it: knowledge of the world, knowledge of texts – how they work, how writers construct them. All children come with previous experiences that they can usefully draw on in understanding new ones. Help them connect!

Provide a rich contextual background to make input comprehensible Make use of other media to provide the child with multiple ways in to the topic, such as pictures and recorded material, which the child can hear more than once. Highlight the text to identify keywords, provide bilingual dictionaries, etc.

Actively encourage comprehensible output This may begin with simple ‘yes/no’ questions to build up confidence and become more elaborate as time goes on. The questions, too, can grow in complexity from a straightforward assessment of the child’s factual understanding, using closed questions such as, ‘How many...’, ‘When did...’, ‘What is ...’ etc, to higher order questions such as ‘Why did...’, ‘How does...’ and ‘What would happen if...’

Draw the learner’s attention to the relationship between form and function, making key grammatical elements explicit Children are actually quite interested in understanding the nuts and bolts of language. This needn’t be dry and tedious. A discovery approach to identifying past tense markers or when capital letters are used in texts, for example, can involve the child working as a language detective to discover the ‘rules’ for themselves. Other languages have different rules (for example, in German all nouns start with a capital letter), and making links with the child’s own language can help them focus on similarities and differences.

Develop learner independence Essentially, our key task as teachers is to help the child learn how to learn. This may begin with such ‘simple’ skills as how to hold a pencil or use scissors and develop as the child’s needs grow to include using dictionaries, searching the Internet, making notes, etc. It should be remembered that students with a fractured formal education may have gaps in their skills and it may be necessary initially to include activities at a lower level than might be expected in terms of age. It is important not to assume that the child is therefore of lower potential ability. It is also vital to convey to learners an expectation that, with appropriate support, they will bridge the gap.

Listening and speaking

Learning a language takes time; remember how many lessons in school it took before you felt able simply to say your name and ask someone else theirs in French, German, or Spanish. Imagine trying to understand or explain convection, feudalism, Pythagoras. New arrivals not only have to learn to talk in English but to learn through English. This dual task provides both challenges and opportunities. In this section I will discuss some practical ways to organise speaking and listening to do just that.

Listen who's talking

Everyday language surrounds children in the playground, streets and shops, and comes at them from the television and radio. Besides the teacher, who will inevitably do most of the talking in class, the new arrivals will also encounter other students and adults, all of whom will shape the language they hear in different ways.

A good place for talk

The first thing to consider is how to make the classroom a supportive environment for spoken language. This includes planning:

- where the child should sit (preferably near the front to ensure they can hear everything the teacher says)
- who they will sit with (ideally a child who speaks the same first language but is more advanced in English, or supportive English speakers)
- visual support for oral language (by having pictures and keywords on display)
- how the child can access their first language (eg through taped stories, the deployment of bilingual assistants and the involvement of parents to translate key words and discuss key concepts).

Listening in, not tuning out

When setting up activities, make sure that pupils have opportunities to:

- listen in to peer talk about an activity as they do it
- do practical activities such as surveying people's birthdays or favourite colours, measuring each other's height or finger span, all useful for helping new arrivals get to know their classmates whilst using a restricted range of language over and over again.
- take part in collaborative tasks that involve purposeful use of language, such as *info-gap* games (eg battle ships) where children have to ask for and share information in order to complete a task.

Model language

A great deal of emphasis in NC documents has been placed on introducing pupils to technical vocabulary. This is important, but the everyday language of the classroom can also be confusing. What, for example, is a new arrival to make of such common classroom instructions as ‘Pull your socks up,’ ‘Knuckle down,’ or even, ‘Pull your finger out’? Pupils need to understand such language, of course, but it is helpful to reword to avoid misunderstandings, at least initially.

All teachers have their particular ways of starting lessons, marking transition points and drawing things to a close. These routines are amongst the first things the new arrival will need to tune in to in order to make sense of what is going on. Making such language and indeed all exchanges clear, concise and consistent will greatly assist the new arrival. Emphasising, repeating and judiciously rephrasing key words and phrases is good practice for all but is particularly helpful to the child struggling to understand. We do not only communicate through words. Never underestimate the importance of clear body language and gestures in getting a message across, remembering that body language varies and such things as eye-contact, volume, and physical proximity when talking vary widely from one culture to another.

Other adults

Mention has already been made of the role of bilingual assistants. Their ability to move between one language and another (code-switching, as linguists call it) is a vital resource not only in helping the child feel secure in knowing what is going on but also to convey the message that being bilingual is a positive asset.

Where EAL teachers are available, they should be involved in advance planning which will allow them to prepare additional resources and suggest strategies and activities which will help new arrivals to develop their skills in this area. EAL teachers and teaching assistants also have a valuable role in providing detailed formative assessment feedback to the class teacher on the child’s progress.

Parents are a much under-used resource, particularly those of bilingual students who may not speak much English. With some goodwill on both sides, however, they can be usefully drawn on to help the child settle in, to support them through use of their first language, and as a resource for the school if they are able to act as interpreters and translators for other parents and students. Skills may be discovered that could eventually lead to employment in the school.

Drawing them in

To the new arrival, the gentle stream of the teacher's speech may at first appear more like a turbulent ocean of noise, occasionally interrupted by islands of tranquillity inhabited by a few castaway words and phrases they understand. Our task is to build bridges between the islands and help the children gradually reclaim more and more of the land.

- A good starting point is to use the child's name whenever you address them – use it frequently and make sure your pronunciation is correct.
- Research has shown that even allowing just a few seconds longer for a child to answer (which can seem like an age in a hushed classroom) has dramatic effects on response rates. Always remember that the child not only has to think of the answer but also how to say it in an unfamiliar language.
- Allowing the child to become familiar with the language and content in a small group setting first gives them an opportunity to hear other children model answers and rehearse their own efforts. Make the process explicit to the fluent English-speakers in the group so that they are aware of simple techniques, such as repeating and emphasising key words, making use of visual supports, using body language and gestures, checking for understanding, etc.

Leading them on

Talk is often most productive when it is not the focus of attention. Games and practical tasks can provide a natural and relaxed context into which effective language practice can be built. The computer is particularly useful, as it provides an inexhaustible and non-judgmental environment and feedback. When children work on a task around the computer as part of a small, mixed language group then they will have a real purpose for communication and conditions under which it is likely to thrive, if scaffolded appropriately.

Reading and writing

A number of issues need to be borne in mind when approaching reading and writing in a second language.

Previous experience of the written word

Literacy is not neutral, it is bound up with our home background and wider culture. Some children will have experienced literacy in a narrow range of settings, others in a wide range. This makes a difference in their expectations of the uses to which literacy can be put and their view of themselves as a consumer or producer of texts. It is therefore essential to make explicit the wide range of literacy practices required in school, and to provide models and opportunities to practise and acquire them.

It's not just a matter of what people are used to reading and writing, however, it's also important to consider how it is approached. Different communities have different literacy practices. Many Afro-American communities, for instance, emphasise reading to learn and as a social activity shared with the group rather than as a private pastime; Muslim children learn whole passages of the Qur'ān by heart in 'maktab' or religious schools; Chinese children also attach importance to repetition and memorising in community classes. Valuing and building on the child's previous experiences provides the surest foundation; starting with familiar text types and gradually extending the range will offer the child a comfortable point from which to explore less familiar terrain.

Transferable skills

If children are literate in another language then they may well have transferable skills that they can draw on to develop their abilities in English, such as:

- knowing that print carries meaning
- being able to identify discrete words on the page
- using images to predict the content of a text.

If the child's first language uses Roman script and is written from left to right then they are likely to have fewer problems in producing legible work than if they are only familiar with a non-Roman script that is written right to left, for example. Legibility and intellectual ability do not go hand in hand, however, and it is important not to confuse the mechanics of writing with ability. That said, students who are literate in another script may well have a significant advantage in

understanding that there is only an arbitrary connection between a word and the way it is written and so be better able at the ‘form and function’ level than those with experience of only one language or script.

Planning children's learning

Maggie Gravelle (2000) has devised this simple but very powerful matrix to help teachers plan to meet the needs of bilingual learners:

| | What does the learner bring to the task? | What does the task demand of the learner? | What support needs to be planned for? |
|------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Social | | | |
| Linguistic | | | |
| Cognitive | | | |

The left hand column reflects the fact that children’s language development does not take place in a vacuum and is affected by both social factors (which includes everything from how the child behaves in a group to their experience of prejudice and racism) and the match between the child’s cognitive abilities and the demands of the curriculum. The top row reflects the need to consider and activate the child’s prior experiences, abilities and skills, to place these in the context of what the task demands and to devise appropriate ways of bridging any gap.

Putting it into practice

Visual support

In the early stages it is particularly important to choose texts that provide plenty of visual support. Photographs and drawings can convey or provide clues to meaning without making heavy language demands. Images from the child’s homeland should be incorporated into the activity to help the child connect with prior experience and know that their own background is validated. Using the ‘images’ menu on a search engine such as www.google.com can help locate a wealth of resources. Diagrams and tables are useful (particularly for non-fiction texts) but have their own conventions which pupils may not be familiar with.

Other adults

Where available, bilingual assistants can provide excellent one-to-one support to new arrivals by translating and summarising texts in the child’s first language. If the child is literate in the language then they can also assess the child’s writing in

that language and translate it, if appropriate, or help the child to do so as their English gradually improves.

EAL teachers and teaching assistants who do not speak the child's language can also offer direct help in making sure the child understands the task and helping scaffold their learning. In order to do this effectively, they need to be part of the initial planning so that they understand the intended outcomes and how these might be achieved with the child or children they will be working with.

Because of their focus on the individual pupil, classroom assistants can play an important part in assessing aspects of learning such as how children behave in a group, motivation and interest in a task and perseverance in the face of difficulty.

Parents and other members of the community can also play a valuable role. For example, Ann Griffin and Sue Allaway (1999) provide a wonderful example of a Japanese mother supporting her child writing in English. Her child was already literate in Japanese but new to English. By translating his work, she and gave him access to a contextualised range of English vocabulary and structures. This had the added advantage of demonstrating his story and handwriting skills to his teachers, who might otherwise have made false assumptions about his abilities as a writer.

Other children

As well as supporting new arrivals in class through normal grouping arrangements, other children can help with reading and writing outside the classroom. Many schools have set up paired-reading schemes where more experienced readers spend time listening to newer ones. Successful schemes tend to be those given a high profile and status, with training sessions for the 'buddy' in how to support reading and certificates given to both partners. Where possible, the child should be paired with a partner who shares the same language and encouraged to read in that language. Books in other languages are widely available (eg libraries or commercial publishers such as Mantra) and dual-language texts written by children are appearing on the internet, for example from the Dual Language Showcase website, created by Thornwood School, USA (<http://thornwood.peelschools.org/Dual/index.htm>)



Isolated new arrivals

As the government's policy on dispersal has been enacted, more and more new arrivals are being placed in schools that have little or no previous history of dealing with children whose first language is not English, let alone those who arrive marked by trauma and loss. Staff have struggled to cope in the face of such new demands and in the absence of adequate training, but there have been some notable successes. A positive, 'can-do' attitude seems to characterise those that have fared best. For example, in the 2003 Ofsted report on 'The education of asylum-seeker pupils', one headteacher of a school with a roll of just 100 pupils received 26 asylum-seeker pupils and commented that it 'had been better than a training video on inclusion'. Can there be a better test of how well your school's policy on inclusion and equality of opportunity is up to the task?

It would be foolhardy to ignore the potential tensions inherent in such a situation, however, and for many staff it may involve an uncomfortable adjustment and revision of 'established' procedures that may now prove unsuitable for the new situation. For example, standardised tests have proven unreliable due to the fact that the new arrival's cultural and linguistic background may be very different from that of the sample population the tests have been normed against. It can be very difficult to resist embedded school practices but this situation should be regarded as an opportunity for development rather than as a threat to tradition.

Even in the most isolated situations, there are potential sources of help. The LEA should be able to provide or buy in appropriate expertise, eg bilingual assistants and refugee advisors, as well as holding information on useful contacts, such as refugee centres.

The internet is a vast resource and very helpful email lists (such as *eal-bilingual* and *ref-ed*) allow you to seek advice and share experiences with colleagues. In addition to the host of sites that offer freely downloadable language activities, the Becta, NALDIC, and Refugee Council websites contain a mine of information, resources, and links (see 'Useful websites' on page 26 for further details).

Conclusion

It is impossible to disagree with the fundamental view of the National Union of Teachers in their 2002 report on *Relearning to Learn*:

In many ways, the task faced by teachers is the same with regard to all new children. They have to make them feel welcome, provide support, encourage friendships, make sensitive assessments of their current levels of attainment and learning needs, and provide a curriculum that meets those needs.

Taking a positive approach is best – always expect that the child can do more than you currently imagine and you will be probably be proved right. When assessing their abilities, start from what they can do rather than what they can't, and what more they can do today than they could yesterday.

Make the maximum use of the human resources at your disposal, starting with the new arrivals themselves. They have already made an unsettling journey; our task is to make the road ahead seem ever more familiar and comforting. We can best do this by giving children a measure of control that their previous experience may well have all but robbed them (and their parents) of. The other children in the class are the next source of support. If they are aware of the issues and determined to be good hosts then they will provide the sort of role models that will help new arrivals stake out an appropriate place for themselves. The child's parents are also key in this; it would be shameful to waste the knowledge and skills they bring with them.

There may be many difficulties as well as the plentiful rewards in working with new arrivals, especially those who have suffered great trauma and loss. It is important to remember that the child is not responsible for the situation they find themselves in. This does not excuse any problems that might arise but it does provide a wider context in which a meaningful and lasting solution is more likely to be found.

Teachers can make real and positive differences to new arrivals' lives. How wonderful to be the kind of school, cited in a 2003 Ofsted report where a Somali mother said:

My children have education. So many valuable opportunities are provided for them. Same for all whether boy or girl, no difference for white or black. My children are very proud.

Let's all be proud.

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Useful websites

- www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk/asylum/refedmaillist.shtml
- www.collaborativelearning.org
- <http://forum.ngfl.gov.uk/WebX?@168.x7BDalOdbwj.7@.ee6be06>
- www.mantralingua.com
- www.naldic.org.uk
- www.ncll.org.uk/40_members/50_aimer
- www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
- www.salisburyworld.org.uk/home.htm



This book provides practical advice on how best to support newly-arrived pupils. It explores

- who these children are
- where and what they have come from
- why they are here
- what we need to know about them and their families
- how we can make our schools more welcoming places
- how we can make the curriculum more accessible
- what help we can get and where we can find it.



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